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Deceptive news

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Deceptive Journalism

Characteristics of untrustworthy news items

Charlotte Govaert, Luuk Lagerwerf and Céline Klemm

Background

Trustworthiness, source fabrication and detection of deception

- ❑ Journalism at risk
Trusted intermediaries now seen as partisan activists (Wahl-Jorgensen et al., 2016)
To regain trustworthiness, verifiability of facts and sources is critical; deception is devastating
 - *How can editorial rooms, besides fact check policies, detect deceptive news items before they are published?*
- ❑ Deception in news
Making up stories easier than construing them out of facts and real sources (Dalecki, Lasorsa and Lewis, 2009)
Source fabrication most occurring type of deception (Lasorsa and Dai, 2007a), next to fact fabrication and plagiarism
- ❑ Source characteristics
Invented sources are more easily fabricated: more sources, longer direct citations
Primary (elite) versus secondary (non-elite) definers (Atton and Wickenden, 2005): the latter less visible
Real sources get unique descriptions; invented ones are described stereotypically/abstractly (DePaulo et al., 2003)
(Secondary) sources in foreign countries hard to trace (Lasorsa and Dai, 2007b); more likely to be eye-witness or victim
 - *Invented news contains more (stereotypically described) (secondarily defined) sources, longer direct citations, referring to self*
- ❑ Stylistic characteristics
Deceivers exaggerate within specific genre (Markowitz and Hancock, 2016)
Typical for news: Embedded Quote (Semino and Sharp, 2004; Lagerwerf, Schurink and Oegema, 2011)
Liars avoid stating verifiable facts, reduce commitments to statements: negative formulations (Van Swol, Braun and Malhotra, 2012)
 - *Invented news contains more embedded quotes and more negations*



Method

Design

- ❑ Dutch journalist's articles identified as deceptive (sources untraceable according to research committee *Trouw*) compared to his own sincere work, and to other journalists' work in national newspapers (three comparable corpora)

Samples

- ❑ Corpus of 126 deceptive news items (no. of words $M = 770.71$; $SD = 558.25$); corpus of 126 items by same journalist, paired in date and length ($M = 629.89$; $SD = 436.21$); corpus of 126 items by other journalists in national newspapers, paired in date, length and topic ($M = 699.12$; $SD = 539.33$).

Content variables

- ❑ Source characteristics
Number of sources; number of direct citations; length of citation; self-reference (mostly within citation)
Primary definers: spokespersons, politicians, CEOs, celebrities, sports professionals; if not: secondary (victim, eye witness, vox pop); use of abstracting descriptions of sources (attributive or predicative adjectives); reference to ethnicity
- ❑ Style characteristics
Use of negation terms (*never*, *not*, *nobody*); Use of embedded quote (Clinton said he smoked marihuana, but he never 'inhaled')
- ❑ Krippendorff's alpha's between .79 and .99

Data analysis

- ❑ Frequency counts and also ratios (number of variable divided by number of words)
- ❑ Comparisons of counts between corpora with non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis tests (Epsilon-squared effect sizes) and Dunn-Bonferroni post hoc pairwise comparisons

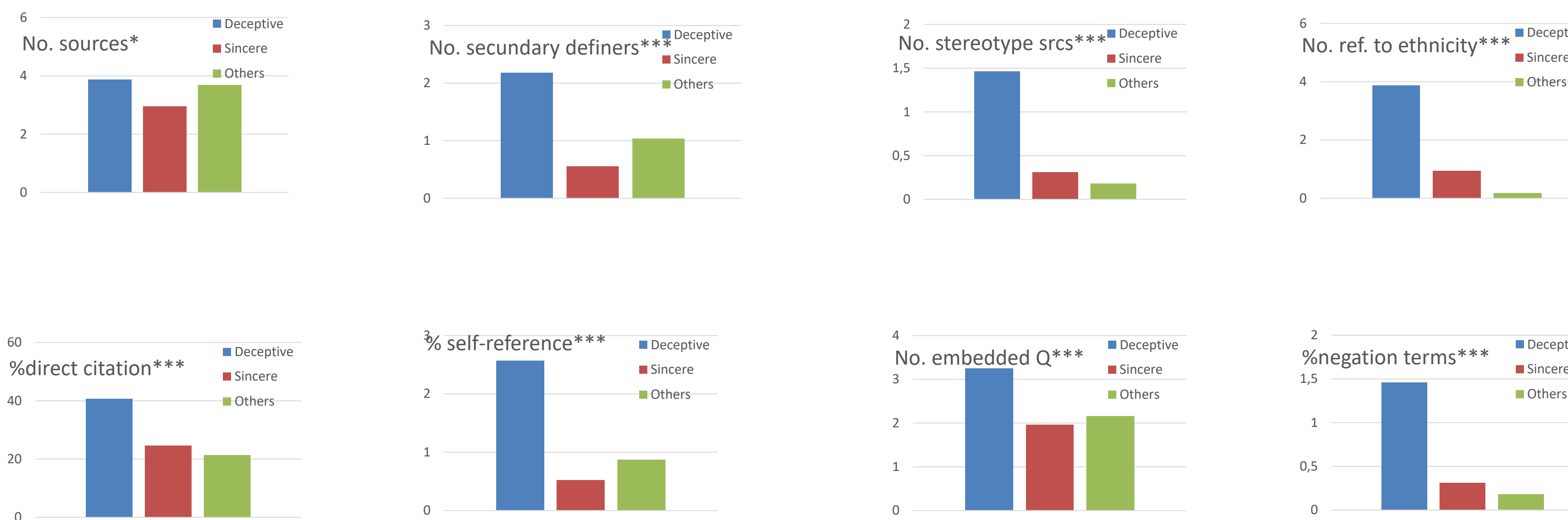


Example

Zijn ouders vreesden dat Hicham Hashmi na het zien van de film 'Fitna' van Geert Wilders zou gaan rellen. Maar Hicham vindt de film een grapje. Grootvader Habib echter voelt de film als verraad. Perdiep Ramesar
Habib Hashmi (69) buigt zijn grijze hoofd, hij sluit zijn ogen en prevelt een kort gebed. De oude vrome Marokkaanse moslim wil de film Fitna van Geert Wilders eigenlijk helemaal niet zien. „Mijn geloof dwingt mij om de film wel te bekijken, want ik mag niet zomaar over iets of iemand oordelen, zonder te weten waar het over gaat. Ik moet deze beelden zien, maar ik kan mijn oogleden niet bedwingen mijn ogen te sluiten, zo gruwelijk zijn ze.”

His parents feared that Hicham Hashmi would go and riot after having seen Geert Wilder's film 'Fitna'. But Hicham thinks the film is a joke. Grandfather Habib, however, experiences the film as betrayal. Perdiep Ramesar
Habib Hashmi (69) bends his gray head, closing his eyes and mumbling a short prayer. The old pious Moroccan Muslim actually doesn't want to watch Geert Wilder's film Fitna at all. „My religion yet forces me to look at the film, because I can't just judge anything or anyone without knowing what it's all about. I have to watch these images, but I can't refrain my eye lids from closing my eyes, as horrible as they are.”

Results



- ❑ For all the above diagrams the pairwise differences were significant between deceptive journalist's news and his sincere news, deceptive journalist's news and the other journalists', but not between the sincere journalist and others (Dunn-Bonferroin post hoc z-tests)
- ❑ Except for no. of sources: Only a significant difference between deceptive and sincere journalist.
- ❑ Effect sizes (E^2) ranged between .02 and .27.

Conclusion

- ❑ Source characteristics
Invented news contains more secondarily defined sources, who are more stereotyped, with more ethnic associations, using longer direct citations and more self-references
- ❑ Stylistic characteristics
Invented news contains more embedded quotes and negation terms
- ❑ Deception prevention
Especially with respect to source characteristics, fact check departments may look for secondarily defined sources with elaborate direct citations, described stereotypically with ethnic references, to detect news that needs checking
In terms of automated analysis, negation terms seems to be a stable indicator of deception; Q is genre-specific



Discussion

- ❑ Invented news presents a more coherent world (Dalecki, Lasorsa and Lewis, 2009)
- ❑ More stereotypical and ethnical descriptions of sources are additionally unfavourable in deception
- ❑ Negativity of deceptive news might also deceive by emotional distraction (fake news, clickbait)
- ❑ Automated analysis is possible, but results will always be context and genre specific
- ❑ Deceptive news is written to look like proper journalism; fake news is written without care for credibility
- ❑ Nevertheless: Future research of text characteristics of clickbait and fake news would be interesting



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